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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine if a relationship exists between the language usage of the individual in the university community and membership in a biosocial group or ideological group. Subjects for the study were selected classes at the University of Nebraska. The classes were composed of the basic speech, oral interpretation, and business and industrial communication courses. Of the total number of subjects, the number of students in the rural ideological group was 165. The measure of difference in language usage was a 300-word cloze passage to which the subjects responded with the words they felt were most appropriate for the blanks in the passage. The data from the clozentropy study were analyzed for differences in language usage between the members of the biosocial group and between members of urban and rural background. The results indicated that there were no significant relationships between the language usage of the individual and his membership in either an ideological group or a biosocial group. It was concluded that neither membership in a rural or urban group nor the sex of the individual have been established as having an effect on the language usage of that individual in the university setting. (WP)

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CONTEXTUAL COMPATIBILITY AS A FUNCTION OF SOCIAL BACKGROUND

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CONTEXTUAL COMPATIBILITY
AS A FUNCTION OF SOCIAL BACKGROUND

For some time scholars in various disciplines have been concerned with the isolation of variables that affect language and, in turn, communication. Quite often, rather obvious language variables assumed to have a powerful effect on language usage are accepted without any substantiation. The interest in the social variables and their relation to language usage was restated in a recent article in Language and Speech which indicated that researchers in areas outside the field of linguistics have been concerned with language usage. More specifically, "A number of studies have been concerned with instances where social structure is reflected in speech usage."¹

The purpose of this study was to investigate two such variables (sex and group membership) to determine if there was a relationship between these distinctions and language usage.

In the attempt to describe that relationship, two distinct groups were identified: those who were members of a given biosocial group (sex) and those who were members of an ideological group (rural-urban background). With respect to expected differences in a biosocial group, Hertzler indicated that:

. . . the dissimilar roles and hence different tasks and interests of men and women as well as male and female children call forth different rules governing their behavior. This often implies different con-

1

Harry Osser and Norman Endler, "Lexical Choice and Social Class," Language and Speech, 4 (1970), 254-61.

notations for different things as well as specialization in vocabulary and usage.²

Although one might be tempted to agree that this statement is justifiable from a descriptive perspective, there is not sufficient experimental data to either affirm or deny the statement.

In addition to possible differences in language usage as a result of sex differences, one might suspect that membership in an ideological group would also evidence itself in differences in language usage by group members. An ideological group is defined as:

. . . a collectivity of people, sometimes widely scattered, who hold a common ideology. While the nature of ideologies differ somewhat, in general ideologies consist of a set of established inter-related beliefs about some matter of major concern.³

Examples of such groups are those concerned with the ideas of Ruralism, Internationalism, Militarism, and Nationalism. "There are two basic aspects to the ideological language. The Declaratory-Descriptive aspect contains the language forms that carry, or serve as vehicles for stating, the beliefs, values, and purposes of the ideology. The Purposiveness aspect contains ideologies that prevail in areas of contradiction and controversy."⁴ This is a fact of central importance in their existence, in the structural-functional forms they take, and of special importance here in the linguistic forms and style that they utilize.

2

Joyce Hentzler, A Sociology of Language (New York: Random House, 1965), p. 318.

³Ibid, pp. 336-337.

⁴Ibid, pp. 336-337.

If we begin to integrate these distinctions between language usage and the ideas expressed by Jespersen, it is assumed that membership in a given group, or being a certain sex, would have an effect on the language usage by individuals. As Jespersen points out,

. . . the social stratification of a country also leaves its mark on the language of persons of different strata. The language shows class differences based on combinations of differential education, ethnic, political, aesthetic, and religious faiths. The kinds of distinctions among strata appear in the use of language - grammar, pronunciation, accent, volume, range, and richness of vocabulary, style, and tastes in the selection and use of words, phrases, and in the use of writing and reading.⁵

Based on this evidence, one would suspect that differences existing between members of a biosocial group would evidence itself in the language used by the member of that group. Given a contextual decision-making situation, we would expect men and women to make different choices in language. Additionally, membership in a given ideological group, defined here as rural or urban, would also tend to produce differences in language usage in a given context.

However, it is possible that the university setting may have a leveling effect on the language usage of either of these previously defined groups in much the same manner that the television has had on regional dialects. One might suspect that the university setting would provide a climate in which leveling would occur as a result of the amount of interaction between members of either the biosocial group, or the ideological group. The ideas proposed by Hertzler and Jespersen and the "interactive climate of the university" seem to be in conflict and

5

Otto Jespersen, "Mankind, Nation, and the Individual," rptd in Joyce Hertzler, A Sociology of Language (New York: Random House, 1965) p. 388.

place this study in the category of testing these assumptions with a specific population. Thus, this investigation is exploratory in nature.

Given these considerations raised in the preceding section of this paper, the research question for the study is as follows: Is there a relationship between the language usage of the individual in the university community and membership in a biosocial group or ideological group?

In this investigation the degree of similarity in language usage was tested using the CLOZENTROPY procedure developed by Darnell in 1970.⁶ The scores produced by this procedure are representative of the degree to which members of a given social group tend to make similar decisions in language usage. An important aspect of this instrument is that it takes into account the entire group and is based entirely on the language system in its totality.

However, in response to Darnell's technique, Reilly noted in a recent article that the procedure used by Darnell would produce both positive and negative scores and was at the same time a cumbersome procedure in scoring. He developed a new formula and indicated it produced all positive scores and was easy enough to score by hand. Because of the simplicity of this procedure, Reilly's formula will be used to score the CLOZENTROPY exam.⁷

6

Donald K. Darnell, "CLOZENTROPY: A Procedure for Testing English Language Proficiency of Foreign Students," Speech Monographs, 37 (1970), pp. 43-44.

⁷Richard Reilly, "A Note on CLOZENTROPY: A Procedure for Testing English Language Proficiency of Foreign Students," Speech Monographs, 38 (1971), pp. 50-52.

Design and Procedure

Subjects for the study were selected classes at the University of Nebraska. The classes were composed of the Basic Speech, Oral Interpretation, and Business and Industrial Communication courses. Of the total number of Ss (291), the total number of students in the rural ideological group was 165. It was composed of 193 female and 98 male subjects. Although the students in these courses were enrolled in a basic course, there was no reason to assume that they were anything different than a normal university population.

Measure

The measure of difference in language usage for this investigation was a 300-word CLOZE passage to which the subjects responded with the words they felt were most appropriate for the blanks in the passage. Since the investigation was exploratory in nature, the subjects were measured only once.

Data

The data from the CLOZE test were interval in nature, and the demographic data for membership in a given group which were collected at the same time were dichotomous.

Analysis

Given the situation where one type of data is interval and the other dichotomous in nature, the appropriate test statistic is the Point Biserial Correlation. To test the differences in language

8

Gene Glass and Julian Stanley, Statistical Methods in Education and Psychology, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), p. 163.

usage between the members of the biosocial group, the R_{pbis} for sex was calculated for each class. To test for difference in the language usage between members of an ideological group, the R_{pbis} was calculated for each class using the members of rural and urban background in each class. Table I presents the obtained correlations for each of the analyses of the tested classes with respect to social or sex group membership.

Results

Reference to Table I indicates that there were no significant relationships found between the language usage of the individual and his membership in either an ideological group or a biosocial group. The authors concluded that membership in a rural or urban group of sex of the individual has not been established as having an effect on the language usage of that individual in the university setting.

Discussion

The lack of a strong and consistent relationship between the language usage and the sex of the individual need further comment with respect to the university setting. It is suspected that the high rate of interaction between members of sex groups in the university setting and in the scholastic environment of the public schools would seem to have reduced the differences in language usage between males and females. From a social perspective, it would seem that we cannot assume that the effect of biosocial group membership is as strong as might have been assumed - at least for the university student. It may be possible to determine if the differences did exist prior to the individual's admittance to the university community. However, to substantiate this, a

TABLE I
Correlations Between Sex, Rural-Urban Back-
ground, and Language Usage for Tested Classes

Group Number	n	M/F Groups	R_{pbis} Rural-Urban
1	10	.14	.47
2	14	.41	.39
3	31	.22	.04
4	34	.13	.01
5	20	.04	.03
6	11	.05	.09
7	9	.03	.01
8	10	.31	.12
9	16	.04	.30
10	11	.16	.01
11	18	.0	.03
12	21	.02	.14
13	25	.02	.04
14	23	.21	.11
15	13	.46	.09
16	14	.00	.30

longitudinal study needs to be designed to determine when and at what age those differences exist. Such a study necessitates the use of students in the public schools as well as in the university setting, and is currently in the planning stage by the authors.

The weak relationship between language usage and ideological group membership seems equally important from the social perspective. It is tempting to make the cause-effect statement that the differences in language usage (because of rural and urban background) have been dissipated by the interaction of these groups in the university community. The data of this study do not allow such a statement to be made. However, the statement that can be made is a directional one in that it appears that language differences which may have been present by virtue of the rural or urban background of an individual may have declined by the time the student has entered the university setting.

Once again, there is a need to investigate this idea and to establish whether or not those differences can be identified prior to an individual's entry into the university community.

Hence, a direction of decline in difference in language usage by a specific population (university students) was discovered in this study with respect to sex and rural-urban background. If this decline can be further established, then other specific populations can be investigated to determine if the variables of biosocial group and ideological group membership may be variables that have been wrongly assumed to produce differences in language usage.

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